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Citation for published version:

Hollis, E 2018, 'Unreliable guides: Introducing, mapping, and performing interiors', *Interiority*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 21-35. <https://doi.org/10.7454/in.v1i1.6>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.7454/in.v1i1.6](https://doi.org/10.7454/in.v1i1.6)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Interiority

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Unreliable Guides Introducing, Mapping, and Performing Interiors

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Abstract

Whether as teachers listening to students, as designers 'pitching' designs to clients, or critics writing about historical spaces, we use speech and gesture to describe interiors. We assume that the interior does not speak on its own, but must be spoken for. How do designers, curators, and guides talk interiors into existence? How, more generally should we speak of the interior?

This paper will explore this issue through reflection on three encounters between space, speech and gesture in the form of guided tours of historic interiors. It will frame these questions with four contexts: firstly, the evolution of the historical concept of the guide; secondly, the idea of the interior as portraiture; thirdly, the evolution, particularly in the twentieth century, of performance (particularly theatrical performance) and finally, the distinction between the interior as image, and the interior as inhabitation.

Keywords: narrative, performance, heritage, creative writing

Introduction

This paper is about encounters: between people, interiors, and the stories they tell about them. I teach interiors, and I spend much of my time listening to the stories students tell about the interiors they are designing. At the same time, I tell my own stories too. My first book, *The Secret Lives of Buildings* was composed as a series of folk tales about the ways in which buildings are, like folk tales, handed from generation to generation, altered and preserved with every retelling. My second, *The Memory Palace: A Book of Lost Interiors* was just that: a construction of vanished rooms, written to remember the people who made, occupied, or destroyed them.

This paper will reflect upon more recent attempts to tell stories about interiors: the first to write a guidebook to a public building; the second to document an artist studio; and the third to recount the experience of visiting a private collection in a historic house.

This reflection has three conceptual frameworks. The first is the concept of the curator or guide: the person whose profession is to tell stories about interiors. The second is the idea of the interior – particularly the private, domestic interior – as portrait, or self-portrait. The third is the relationship between the interior and performance.

These frameworks may be familiar to the scholar of the interior; but this paper will reconfigure them to suggest that the guide creates as well as curates; that the subject of the portrait – be it interior or occupant – will always evade the portraitist; and that interiors are not just the settings for performances, but their script and subject.

Finally, this paper will suggest that the idea of the interior as performance can offer a way for interior designers to resolve the tension, observed, for example by Penny Sparke (2008), between the interior as a fixed image and the interior as the protean space of lived occupation. As performance, perhaps, the interior can live both within, and outside time.

This reflection will be, I hope, of use to the creators of interiors whose practices negotiate that very paradox, and will suggest ways in which story can act not just as the record of space, time, and action but also its genesis.

A Riddle

Why Was This Text Written?

This first text is the introduction to a guidebook to Riddles Court, the oldest house in Edinburgh, the city in which I live. In 2017 I

was commissioned to write this guide by the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust, who recently re-opened the building to the public after a decade-long campaign of restoration. The book is due to be published in the spring of 2018.

An Unreliable Guide

Once upon a time, at Riddles Court, there was an unreliable guide. With a 'grand proprietorial air', one student later remembered, Mr. McKay

points out the very spot where the Bailie breathed his last, and tells how the old worthy entertained Bonnie Prince Charlie and Queen Mary at right royal entertainments... Then the old man unbends his back and points up with his stick to a plaster bust of Socrates that a man of unclassical tastes put out in a niche because there was no place for it in his room. 'Yonder' he says, is the image o' Bailie McMorran hi'sel'; it's said to be jist a wonerfu' guid likeness; and the tourists look up open mouthed at the rain-and soot-streaked ancient and wonder where the sounds of laughter come from. 'Ou, it's jist they daft student laddies' says McKay (Burn, 1894, pp. 11-12)

And he shepherds them on.

He might have been a joke, but Mr. McKay's tall tale will tell you everything you need to know about Riddles Court: about confused tourists, student pranks, famous philosophers, a royal banquet, a Bailie, and his untimely end.

It's a long, and complicated story; and we can hardly blame the unreliable guide for getting confused. Everyone who has occupied Riddles Court has like, Mr. McKay, told the same stories – about Banquet and Bailie, refined court and reeking slum, Town and Gown – for their own ends. Those tales have, like the building itself, changed with every retelling.

This guide will follow Mr. McKay, room by room, working backwards in time to the Banquet and the Bailie, and meeting, along the way, all the others whose stories reside in the walls, floors, stairs, and ceilings of Riddles Court.

Performer and Performance

Mr. McKay, the unreliable guide who forms the centrepiece of this short text was, according to the author of the description, a professional tourist guide of the late nineteenth century. There are many hundreds of them still today – leading ghost and torture tours, garden walks, architectural surveys, and more. They are more

reliable than he ever was.

Mr. McKay is an outsider, for he walks the street, rather than entering the interiors of the buildings whose stories he is paid to tell. As an outsider, he is ignorant; and his ignorance is amusing to 'they daft student laddies' who live inside the interior he is narrating. The trick they play on him reinforces their 'ownership' of the building as set against his disenfranchisement. The bust of Socrates they place on the windowsill is mistaken by Mr. McKay for the Bailie McMorran: the very man who built Riddles Court in the sixteenth century– the origin and the original owner of the building. Of course, it's an act – a pact, in fact; and the real butts of the joke are the real outsiders, the ignorant tourists, who are foolish enough to believe McKay's fabrications.

There is nothing disembodied, nothing transparent about a guide; and there has never been. The profession leads back from the apps and audio guides with which tourists make their way around heritage sites today, to the Baedekers of the cultural tourists of the twentieth and nineteenth centuries. Both narrative and objective, guides are framed, on the one hand as media of engagement, and on the other as repositories of scholarly wisdom.

But they have antecedents in other more ancient practices. In the late seventeenth century, for example, *Le Maniere de Montrer les Jardins de Versailles*, was published, and written supposedly, by the hand of Louis XIV himself. If the metaphor of the Baedeker is the transparent glass cabinet in the public museum, the metaphor of the early modern guide is the host, who has condescended to open the doors of his cabinet to show you their private collection – or, at least to show you what they want you to see of their collection.

And then, before, there are guides written for people who would never visit the places they described. The traveller's tale is a story for what, if armchairs had existed in the middle ages, would have been called armchair travellers. Without the verification of an actual visitation, their relationship to the truth is as tangential as Mr. McKay's. No one believed Marco Polo on his return to Venice, for example, when he told them about what he had seen on his through Asia.

And always, there has been the guide waiting at the gate to the temple or the palace who, like Mr. McKay, confects a story about the past from a jumble of the present imagination. Why ever would they not? There is nothing transparent about space. However much we like there to be, there is in, bricks and mortar, no neat historical sequence, of diverse periods arranged in linear space.

Rather, every historic building - built on top of, out of, into, over, another - is like the story of Mr. McKay, a riddle of simultaneities, in which an ancient philosopher can become a renaissance merchant, and two monarchs put aside the centuries that divide them to take dinner together. Every historic building is already, without the creative intervention of a Mr. McKay, an unreliable guide.

The Solution to the Riddle

Mr. McKay and the 'daft student laddies' act out a comic scene, a confusing riddle: of times, places, facts, people and building.

It is a Riddle with a solution: the final paragraph of the text enjoins the reader to 'follow Mr. McKay, room by room, working backwards in time to the Banquet and the Bailie, and meeting, along the way, all the others whose stories reside in the walls, floors, stairs, and ceilings of Riddles Court.'

A self-conscious attempt to help people imagine themselves into the building as they read, the structuring device for this guidebook, is a walk, real or imagined, from room to adjacent room. This movement, which takes place within a short span of time, is choreographed to reveal, in minutes the progress of lives and centuries, stones and walls and rocks, over centuries.

Rita

Why Was This Text Written?

If the 'Unreliable Guide' reflects on the creation of a public narrative for a public building, in 'Rita' we encounter a more private world.

In 2017, I spent ten days in Casablanca in Morocco, in the studio of an artist, Rita. In July of the same year she did likewise in Edinburgh in my own place of work. During and following these visits, we have been working on the synthesis of our mutual experience.

Unlike the guidebook to Riddles Court, which was, like a design for a building, heavily 'briefed', I had no idea what we were going to do, and the outcome of our collaboration has been as unexpected to me as it was to Rita.

Every day while I was in Casablanca, I visited Rita in her studio. She showed me around, taking objects off shelves, or out of cupboards, she would tell me about them. As we conversed, I would photograph them; and afterwards, I made architectural drawings of the studio, upon which I marked the location of these objects. At the same time, I found myself writing a collection of 18 written 'vignettes' that reflected, in scale, the size of the objects Rita was showing me.

Upon my return to Edinburgh, I synthesized this material into a 'map' of Rita's studio, inspired, in part, by tourist guide maps I had picked up in Casablanca, in which drawings, stories, or photographs of 'sights' are superimposed onto a more abstract cartography, collapsing, within the plane of a single sheet of paper, different modes of representation. In counterpart, Rita is currently working on a series of collages that depict her experiences in Edinburgh.

Rita

Introducing Rita

"Meet Rita," she said, "she's a Moroccan artist, student in the art schools of Paris and New York. Her great grandmother was kidnapped to be a slave. Oh, and yes, she's descended from the Prophet."

That's what she said. Literally. She'd invited me for a drink in her hotel, in some palace in Marrakesh – in her space, not mine – and that's how she introduced me.

"I'll get you show in Zurich," she said, but I never heard from her again.

The Berber House

I show Rita Pierre Bourdieu's famous plan of the Berber House: 'This is how I want to document your studio.' I say. 'I'm going to draw the room, and interview you, and perhaps, there'll be a sort of anthropology in there.'

'We have to start somewhere, I suppose.' She shows me, packed in a box, two photographs, of a real Berber House she went to visit a couple of years ago.

'There's only one room.' She says, 'In the day they pack everything away, and only two things remain.

Above the window, carved into the plaster the name of God.

Below the window, placed on the carpet, the television.'

Residency #1

I'm disappointed: Rita tells me: she's just had a big tidy-up.

'It's not to do with you. I just decided I needed more space – and the residency had to go.'

It's been running for four years; and lots of people have come and gone: Anna Sabina, who distilled essences, Pierre, who carved and manipulated books, the Indian who cooked odoriferous curries; the young writer who was too terrified

of Morocco to leave the flat on his own; the Frenchman who turned her into an anthropology project.

‘Not always; but it worked.’ She says, ‘Working here on my own, I’m isolated, and the residencies gave me people to talk to and work with.’

She gestures toward the screen she built to divide her studio from the rest of the flat: ‘this kept them out,’ she adds, ‘so I could get on with some work, too.’

Performer and Performance

Rita is the chief occupant and the creator of the interior to which she acts as a guide. It is not a ‘designed’ interior, nor a historic one, but a room that is lived in, privately. The stories she tells us, and the objects and places that prompt them, are, unlike Mr. McKay’s, entirely her own.

Interiors have long been conceived of as portraits - or self-portraits - of the people who assemble them. The interior, writes Mario Praz, is “a museum of the soul, an archive of its experiences; it reads in them its own history” (Praz, 1949, p. 24). Penny Sparke quotes Elsie de Wolfe, as saying: “You express yourself in your home whether you want to or not” (Sparke, 2008, p. 91). Charles Rice charts, in *The Emergence of the Interior* the evolution of the very word, and the concept of interior from conceptions of the interior of the self to the insides of buildings.

In the same way, Danny Miller’s *The Comfort of Things* can, in the field of anthropology let alone interior design, discuss the room as the self-portrait of this occupant.

The person in that living room gives an account of themselves by responding to questions. But every object in that room is equally a form by which they have chosen to express themselves. They put up ornaments; they laid down carpets... Some things may be gifts or objects retained from the past, but they have decided to live with them, to place the in lines or higgledy-piggledy; they made the room minimalist or crammed to the gills. These things are not a random collection. They have been gradually accumulated as an expression of that person or household (Miller, 2008, p. 2)

Rita’s studio had not been made for public consumption. But the matter of who saw it, and what they saw, was not of indifference to her. When I returned from Casablanca, I sent Rita my ‘map’ and at the same time, we corresponded on Instagram, upon which she posted images of her studio in the ensuing weeks and months. What soon

became apparent was just how much she had changed the room around after reading my stories.

This was not a matter of improvement – I had made no suggestions about how to rearrange the space. Rather, our collaboration had, Rita noted in our conversations, made her self-conscious about her studio, and as a result, she felt obliged to change it. It was a strategy of evasion – of ensuring that the room no longer reflected the document I had made to map it.

My self-appointed task had been to document the room, as a portrait of the person who had created it; but in fact, despite myself, I found out that I was, destroying the very thing I had come to preserve.

An Unreliable Guide (Again)

In composing these vignettes, I tried to reflect our process of collaboration by writing myself into the room. I am, I tell the reader, the western orientalist intruder, a snobbish Bourdieu, posing as the anthropologist, the American art dealer. My gaze rather than being some disembodied universal eye, is part of the problem.

This is something of a writer's caveat – a way of trimming the reader's expectations about my own ability as a white, middle class, middle-aged Anglo-Saxon man to enter her world; but there is a simpler reason, too. My account of Rita's studio is obliged to start from a point of not knowing where to start on a collaborative project with an artist, about a private interior.

Our collaboration had to precede with caution, through the exchange of gifts like the revelations made by Rita, and in return, my own writings. The publication of these stories is of course subject to Rita's approval, and, I am keen, also her intervention. We have discussed ways in which she will correct them, visibly, as a form of emendation (in perhaps, handwritten Arabic or French) that 'answers back' to the word processed English text, I have created. The end result of this process remains unknown.

In writing of Rita, in speaking of an interior, I have found myself an intruder, recording a world that of its very nature, as a private interior, evades my attempts to record it.

Maggie

Why Was This Text Written?

In this last vignette, I hope to resolve some of the tensions that may have arisen by comparing encounters with the private studio of Rita Alaoui with the public spaces of Riddles Court.

'Maggie' recounts a recent visit to a house near Edinburgh, in which 'the countess' led a tour of her family's collection of eighteenth-century French Royal furniture. This tour was one of many on the weekend, in which collectors, curators, and countesses shared their interiors with the curators and connoisseurs of the Furniture History Society.

Maggie

'Maggie!'

But the dog gets there first. It potters about, threatening to cock its leg against the Rieseners and the Roentgens, and to widdle on the Savonnerie.

'The carpet was cut down at the Revolution,' she says, 'You can see where the line is, where they got rid of Marie Antoinette's monogram.'

The countess is slower than her dog. It takes her some time to negotiate the red rope that divides us from the room, and she moves unsteadily, gripping the fragile edges of *escritoire* and *secretaire* for support. On top of one particularly grand cabinet, two urns wobble.

'Chinese. Of course. Though the *ormolu* mounts are French. Obviously.'

She is distracted. 'This one's lovely, isn't it?' She muses, 'It was made for the Dauphine. Portable. And lockable. This is the key. Go on – take a look.'

She passes the key over the red rope, and we reverentially hand round an object that once sat in the hand of a princess of Versailles. Then the countess takes it back. She turns it in the lock, and the table springs open, like a flower, surprised by the sun.

'Of course, they were never meant to be brown like this. No, when they were new, the veneers all had different colours: greens, and blues, and reds.'

'We keep them here in the dark, now, but it's too late really. It happens, apparently, in the first eighteen months. The fading. Now we just keep them here. It's just too much of a risk to do anything else.'

And we watch in fascinated horror, as the countess lurches off through the precious reef of royal furniture, with Maggie running around feet and legs that could buckle and crack at any moment.

On the other side of the room, her arthritic hand lands on the corner of a grand secretaire.

'Not sure who did this one. Of course, for my father-in-law these weren't Rieseners and Oebens and "pieces". This one was where he kept the Sunday papers.

He liked playing games with it all, yes. It was him that got that bust of Robespierre, and put it on top of that desk – yes, that one there. It was made for Marie Antoinette, the desk, you see. It was his little joke.

But, for him, for most of the time, this was just furniture.'

Next to me, Laura, who used to work at the V and A, shoots me a glance. We'd been talking earlier – about the time when, sixty years before, she'd turned up at dawn, to collect half the fabled collection and take it away.

'Death Duties.' Announces the countess.

'Well. There's nothing we can do about it now. So I do my best to look after what we still have left.

I didn't know where to start when I started. I knew nothing about furniture. I was in the theatre. Yes I was. We had great fun, doing things in the Fringe, in the early years, at Riddles Court, you know, with Maggie. Yes, Maggie. Smith. We had such fun.

Maggie!

And now I'm here in this room, with the curtains drawn, full of chairs I can't sit in, and desks I can't write at.

Anyway...'

The scene completed, the countess shuffles her way through her inheritance, back to the red rope that divides her from her audience.

'Excuse me. This way everyone. I think, next, the Napoleon Room.

Maggie!'

Performer and Performance

Unlike Mr. McKay, 'the countess' owns and occupies the house in which her collection is held and we enter it at her invitation. Unlike Rita, the interior she shows us is not quite a private, lived, domestic interior.

The room in which the collection is held - never usually occupied, divided by a red rope, furnished with chairs and tables that have not been sat in or at for decades, is a space of performance.

And the subject of this performance, physically enacted on the 'wrong' (or the 'right'?) side of the red rope is the ritual of possession. Only the countess is allowed to touch the sacred objects of the room. Only her dog is permitted to trot among the canapés and the secretaries.

But, at the same time, this performance of possession is nuanced. Having acquired the collection by inheritance and marriage, rather than birth, into an ancient family, the countess is not truly at liberty to dispose of it. Furthermore, this incomplete collection is the result of centuries of attrition: not just the great dispossession of death duties in a post-imperial, post aristocratic Britain, but also that of the Revolution that removed these pieces of furniture – and the people for whom they were made - from Versailles in 1789. Finally, the value of the collection makes the room in which it has been collected unusable as an interior. The countess, despite the initial impression of grandeur, then, acts more as the curator than the creator or 'user' of her fragmentary legacy; and this is a role that she performs with aplomb.

After all, as she tells her audience, in her youth she worked with the grand dowager of all comic actresses, Maggie Smith; and her performance of the ritual of possession was just as subtly contrived as any performance of that grand dame. All that shouting at the dog, the lurching from piece to piece, on the verge at any moment, of destroying one priceless masterpiece or another, was, I realised, upon leaving that hallowed room, quite as much of an act as the reverential references to Marie Antoinette, and the hushed handing round of the key of the Dauphine.

This was comic acting of the highest order. It was also physical theatre. Her ramblings through the room brought it to life as she moves – or more accurately, lives, as she conjured up, from the same pieces of furniture, her father-in-law, Robespierre, and Roentgen.

From time to time, in the classic tradition of cabaret or comic theatre, the 'fourth wall' was broken. We were treated to gifts – the key of the queen of France, passed round between us reverentially like a relic, confidences thrown out apparently casually, about her father in law's feet up on the *escritoire*, or the countess' own humble origins – the sorts of things one would never find on a label in a museum.

Setting and Script

Often unscripted (if much rehearsed) guides design and build

intangible interiors of the imagination, coterminous with the tangible ones in which they, and we, their audiences stand.

In *The Comfort of Things* for example, Danny Miller has observed how people tell the rooms they live in as stories, not just in words, but also in gestures and other performative modes. 'Elia', for example uses speech to refer to pieces of furniture in the rooms as objective correlatives of relatives or other absent friends.

Her hands dance the tales she tells, and through some sleight of hand a ghost suddenly appears and dominates the room for a while before fading back into some furniture or piece of clothing that has become its home in her world. There are many such ghosts who talk, not only to her, but to each other, crowding the room with their admonishings and comforts.... at the head of this pantheon from the other world stands a serene figure, an avatar of divine imagery, a model of sagacity – her grandfather. Much of the time he is at rest in the little table in the corner of the room, which he crafted when he was alive, and has been part of her life since she was a child (Miller, 2008, p. 33)

There is nothing new in connecting the interior and performance. Renaissance and Baroque theorists saw architecture as the scenery of the *theatrum mundi*: the arena of moral action.

However, as 'the countess', or 'Elia' talks about the room and its contents, that room becomes the script of the performance – its very subject – as well as its setting; and that sets another set of speculations in play.

We cannot say that modern drama theory is a closed and resolved book. However, we can frame its field of reference. On the one hand, there is the script, as individually authored: a dry skeleton as yet devoid of life. On the other is the physical and collective fact of the performance.

The 'ground zero' of modern drama theory is the 'realistic' translation of the script into performance in the late nineteenth century. Sets built as facsimiles of the locales described in the script and period costume attempted to bridge the gulf between the intentions of the author and his audience. (Milling and Ley 2001: 28) This might be compared to the idea of a 'transparent' guide – the Baedeker, for example, which, ostensibly, does nothing other than illuminate what is already there.

But in the early twentieth century, Stanislavski questioned the supremacy of the script, describing its text as 'not valuable in and of itself' (Stanislavski Building a Character Milling and Ley 2001: 22)

until performers 'breathe the life of their own sentiment into the subtext' (ibid.). In this context, the interior ceases to be the passive scene of scripted action – rather it is a point of departure for many actions or dramas which may not be predictable – the period room, for example, in which the dog can widdle on the carpet.

Jerzy Grotowski placed even more emphasis on the presence of the actor, insisting on the primacy of performance over the script. The performance of a play should be "Like looking at *oneself* [my italics] in a mirror, at *our* [my italics] ideas and traditions, and not merely the description of what men of past ages and thought and felt" (Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, in Milling & Ley, 2001, p. 131).

The logical conclusion of the idea of the script as an empty skeleton, into which performance breathes life, is that the performance has autonomy of its own. Writing in criticism of 'realistic' mimetic theatre, Edward Craig writes: "Today they [actors] impersonate and interpret, tomorrow they must represent and interpret, on the third day they must create..." (Craig, *The Actor and Über-marionette*, in Milling & Ley, 2001, p. 50).

And here we enter another interior territory – in which the unreliable guide, or the eccentric 'countess' create, in the room, in collaboration with the people who have come to see them, a new reality, a new interior, that however old the walls and the floors and furniture might be, can exist only for the duration of that performance, before disappearing again.

Discussion

How Should We Speak of Interiors?

Each of the stories presented here attempts to introduce an interior. Each of one of them contains, also, a story about someone showing someone else that interior. Each of these stories is, and depicts, a guide.

If they have taught you anything it is, I hope, that there is nothing inevitable about a guide, myself or my writings included. These interiors are portraits of people quite as much as they are of interiors – self portraits, in fact - for the stories that the countess, or Rita or even McKay choose to tell are ultimately, stories about themselves. They are performances, and, what is more, designs for new interiors, for guides create, in immaterial words and gestures, imagined and imaginary interiors, in the same place as the tangible ones in which they speak and gesture.

How should I, how should we, then, speak of interiors? How might

we design them? And how might these observations above help us to do so? In *The Emergence of the Interior* Charles Rice explains the etymology of the word 'interior':

The interior...emerges as a physical, three-dimensional space, as well as an image, whether it be a two-dimensional representation such as a painting, a print in a portfolio of decoration, or a flat backdrop that could conjure up as a theatrical scene. This image-based sense also encompasses a reverie or imaginal picture..., which could transform an existing spatial interior into something other. Significantly, doubleness involves the interdependence between image and space, with neither sense being primary (Rice, 2006, p. 2)

But at the same time, as Suzie Attiwill has written, the interiors are also a dynamic process of what she calls 'interiorization':

Working space – occupation becomes occupying as employing – invokes a different kind of position where space is not assumed as pre-existing but produced. The temporal becomes a critical and vital condition... Occupation becomes a process of transformation, of making relations. Interior design shifts from a practice necessarily equated with the design of inside space to a practice of interiorization. This introduces time as a dynamic and provokes a re-conceptualisation of interior as temporal framing as distinct from a spatial enclosure. (Attiwill, 2009, p. 2)

Considering the interior as a sort of performance can lend us a way of thinking about how to harness such processes. Performance is not just occupation, but occupation codified into an image – or at least a 'work' (of art). It has been suggested that architecture is Music frozen in time. I would like to suggest here, that there is nothing frozen about it – and that, just as Music or speech makes figures in time so the interior makes figures in time and space. T. S. Eliot writes, in 'Burnt Norton':

Words Move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only fie. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness
(Eliot, 1943)

The interior in time can be a work of art, a pattern; but that is not to say that the process of interiorization can be singly authored – rather,

like the sorts of performances of drama envisioned by Grotowski or Copeau, it is a collaborative act of repeated reinvention – the performance of a script, or the retelling of an old tale.

And Who is Speaking of Them?

In this paper, I hope, I have designed, built, decorated, and furnished imaginary interiors, not in bricks and mortar, cushions and curtains, nor chairs and tables, but in words. All you have seen is me, talking and gesturing, into empty air. As far as you know, the interiors described in this paper may not exist. They certainly no longer exist in the form I have described them here.

Or, at least, they exist only in one dimension. The performed portraits you have experienced in this paper require a portraitist a guide, and a performer. I am fabulating and pointing like Mr. McKay, like Rita, reluctantly revealing, stumbling around, like the countess, and in performing them, I perform the interiors that they themselves have performed. Narrated, performed, those interiors have for a few moments, existed.

And now they are gone again. The rooms like dormant, wherever they are, awaiting another performance, another performer to make a portrait of, another unreliable guide.

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